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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 000858

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PK](#)
SUBJECT: MISSION CONVEYS CONCERN OVER ARRESTED AHMADI TEENS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Jerry Feierstein for reasons 1.4 (b),
(d).

[¶1.](#) (C) Summary: Both Embassy and Consulate Lahore have interceded with Pakistani officials and community representatives on behalf of four Ahmadi teenagers arrested on charges of blasphemy for writing the name of the Prophet Mohammed on a latrine wall of a Sunni mosque. Minority Affairs Minister Bhatti committed to send a formal inquiry to the Punjab Inspector General of Police, the law enforcement authority which he said has jurisdiction over the condition of the teens' detention. He also promised to raise Embassy's concerns at the next federal cabinet meeting. End Summary.

Concerns Conveyed
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[¶2.](#) (C) PolOff met April 16 with Minorities Affairs Minister Shahbaz Bhatti to express Post's concern over the January 28 arrest and continued detention of four Ahmadi teens. Police in Punjab's Layyah district arrested the four, aged 14-19, on blasphemy charges. They are accused of writing the name of the Prophet Muhammad on the latrine wall of their local Sunni mosque. Under Pakistan Penal Code Section 295-C, the teens could face life in prison or death, though no one has ever been executed under this law. An Ahmadi adult is also charged with conspiracy in relation to the alleged incident.

[¶3.](#) (C) The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, a U.S.-based non-profit, has recently corresponded with the Ambassador about this specific case and has claimed the charges are baseless. Embassy and Consulate Lahore have spoken to community representatives in Pakistan as well as human rights organizations involved in the case. The accused are currently detained about 96 miles away from their home village at a prison in D.G. Khan district, Punjab. According to human rights contacts, the police may have arrested the teens even before a first information report (FIR) was filed; although this would be unusual overall, in blasphemy cases, officials often act without specific evidence. The teens last saw their families briefly before the transfer to D.G. Khan. A district judge denied them bail after a February 17 court appearance, and has not set a future court date. According to community representatives, the accused are being denied access to their attorneys as well as to visitors from human rights organizations and the media.

[¶4.](#) (C) Bhatti was not surprised by such reports. Though his ministry would be the responsible federal agency to monitor the status and well-being of these members of this minority community, he admitted he had not taken any specific action on this case. Bhatti committed to send a formal inquiry to the Punjab Inspector General of Police, the law enforcement

authority which he said has jurisdiction over the condition of the teens' detention. He also promised to raise Embassy's concerns at the next cabinet meeting. Bhatti was encouraged by and grateful for the interest of a third country.

¶5. (C) Bhatti, however, lamented that little would likely improve for the teens and noted that Pakistan's blasphemy laws are extremely broad and offer few legal counter-claims. He confirmed that blasphemy cases can carry on for years as most evidence is circumstantial and based on hearsay. He said his ministry had submitted proposed amendments to the blasphemy provisions to address some of these weaknesses; they were currently under review by the Law Ministry. He would not hazard a guess on when the Law Ministry would finally reply so that the full cabinet could approve and present the amendments to the National Assembly.

¶6. (SBU) Note: Ahmadis claim Islam; however, Pakistani law does not recognize the sect as Muslim and prohibits the group, which numbers over two million, from engaging in any Muslim practices. They have been prohibited from proselytizing, holding gatherings, or distributing literature. Government forms, including passport applications and voter registration documents, require anyone wishing to be listed as a Muslim to denounce the founder of the Ahmadi faith. As of last year's International Religious Freedom Report (IRFR), 31 Ahmadis faced criminal charges under religious-based laws, and four Ahmadis were the victim of religious-based murders, figures accepted from the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC). End note.

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